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# THE PROPOSED HARRIMAN STATE PARK



THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY  
OF NEW YORK CITY

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POPOLOPEN CREEK IN PROPOSED HARRIMAN STATE PARK.

# THE PROPOSED HARRIMAN STATE PARK

## A PEOPLE'S PLAYGROUND ON THE PALISADES

BY

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Photographs by O. R. Houston and H. A. Caparn

The magnificent gift by Mrs. Edward H. Harriman of land for a state park lying about her home at Arden in the highlands of the Hudson, together with money to buy land between it and the river, which Governor Hughes announced in his last annual message, has been formally presented to the Legislature in a bill. Coincident with it the Palisades Park Commission, which for years has been preserving the Palisades from encroachment, announced plans for their

extension up to Newburgh on condition that the new state prison be not built at Bear mountain in the midst of the tract. The preservation of great natural beauty was the avowed purpose in both cases, but marked social uses have developed and greater ones are in prospect. Under the commission, the narrow strip of level land at the foot of the Palisades has been occupied every summer by camps and tent colonies, and Governor Hughes pointed out in his message that the new



Anthony's Nose.

VIEW OF HUDSON RIVER FROM BEAR MOUNTAIN PLATEAU.

Harriman Park has wonderful possibilities as a playground for the people.

The district covered by the proposed park has for many years been the site of camps run by settlements, churches and other philanthropic agencies in New York. Recently their number has been greatly lessened by the difficulty of securing sites accessible to the city where camping is not prohibited because the waters of adjoining lakes are controlled by water companies. This had awakened a hope among social workers in congested city districts that some day a great municipal camp might be secured, regulated and protected in such a way that children, young men and even adults from the tenement districts could find a place for rest and recuperation. The desire for such a great free land has been voiced in more than one club meeting and around many a tenement fireside. The recent gift seems to point the way toward its realization. The Parks and Playground Commission of the Municipal Arts Society has interested itself in this phase of the Harriman gift and has urged the Palisades Park Commission to incorporate in its plans an extension of the camp feature which it has so successfully developed on a small scale. To plan new social uses for the park, to determine what types of camps are desired, and to arrange to make the park available for such uses, the committee, including engineers and landscape architects, has made a study of the tract. Its findings in brief are as follows:

Three types of camp are needed by city people: camps for day excursions,

for week ends, and for longer vacations of about two weeks.

Day excursions by boat and train, which are common in the summer, are usually made up of members of organizations connected with churches, settlements, public schools, trade unions and political organizations. In many instances the parks they visit are badly located, devoid of beauty and surrounded by degrading influences. Should the shores of the Hudson possess a beautiful park properly supervised and equipped and so regulated that it might be used by these organizations, it would prove a great boon to the individuals and raise the standard of city morals.

Week ends are enjoyed by poor as well as rich. A Saturday half holiday and Sunday of rest are the common practice. The city workers seek an opportunity to get away from heat and dust and noise. In the tent colonies under the Palisades and in other camps a large number of young men have demanded admission for Saturday and Sunday only. If the Harriman State Park were equipped with tents or other shelter to be had at a reasonable rate, thousands of young working people could enjoy the invigoration of its mountain air without cost to the state.

The two weeks' vacation is the only opportunity given to most of the working classes to get entirely away. Often whole families or groups of friends secure their vacation at the same time and move out into the country. Tent colonies are popular and there are now many devices for making them sanitary and comfort-



Dunderberg.

#### PROPOSED CAMP SITE NO. 1.

able. They need not be as accessible as the other types of camps but they should be near the water, be properly policed and possess sanitary conveniences.

In considering the availability of the Harriman Park for such uses, we must have its probable boundaries clearly in mind and determine what portions cannot be made camp sites because of their use as sources of city water supply. A general outline of the boundaries is given in the accompanying map. Let us see what they are: Mrs. Harriman is ready to convey to the state a tract of about 10,000 acres situated in Orange and Rockland counties to be held in perpetuity as a state park and, further, to give \$1,000,000 with which to acquire and improve adjacent land, so that the park may have some river frontage and be rendered more accessible, useful and beneficial.

#### POSSIBILITIES FOR SITES

In addition to Mrs. Harriman's gift, the Palisades Park Commission has secured private subscriptions of \$1,625,000 from residents of New York and New Jersey and has planned to build a roadway along the base of the Palisades from Fort Lee to Piermont, to extend the present park northward as contemplated in the act of 1906, to create and improve under its jurisdiction a Highlands Park including the land to be conveyed by Mrs. Harriman, with suitable connections between these parks and with the state reservation at Stony Point, and to extend the proposed park northward along the river to Newburgh.

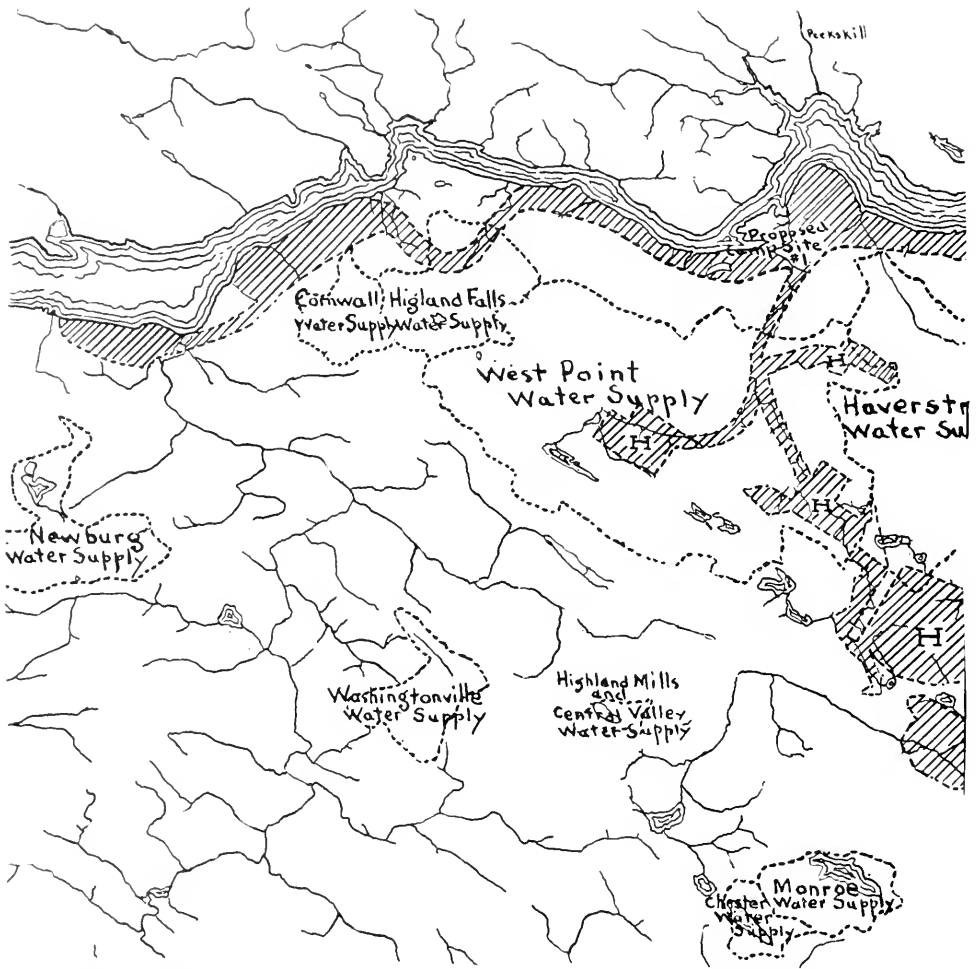
In addition, the state has acquired

nearly 2,000 acres near Thiells, adjacent to the proposed park, for the Eastern New York State Custodial Asylum to be known as Letchworth Village.

The proposed park, then, in addition to the Interstate Palisades Park and the mountain lands along the west bank of the Hudson in Rockland county north of Piermont creek and south of the state reservation at Stony Point, will contain in the main a tract to be extended northward from Haverstraw along the west bank of the Hudson to Newburgh, and westward to include the Ramapo mountains.

Mrs. Harriman's gift indicated by the sections marked H on the map, lies practically all in Orange county, most of it being in the town of Tuxedo with an adjacent strip in the town of Woodbury and with two small isolated tracts in the towns of Highland and Stony Point. In order to connect these tracts with each other and with the proposed extension along the river front, the Palisades Park Commission has planned for connecting strips of land along the line of the north branch of Miniscongo creek from Haverstraw to the Harriman tract in Orange county just west of Johnsonstown, a distance of about ten miles; and following the Queensboro brook to connect the main tract with the isolated tracts in the towns of Highland and Stony Point and with the proposed river front extension at a point west of the Dunderberg mountain, thus providing a continuous circuit joining the Harriman gift with the Hudson.

The Harriman tracts in the towns of Woodbury, Highland, and Stony Point,



MAP SHOWING THE PROPOSED CAMP SITES IN THE HARRIMAN STATE

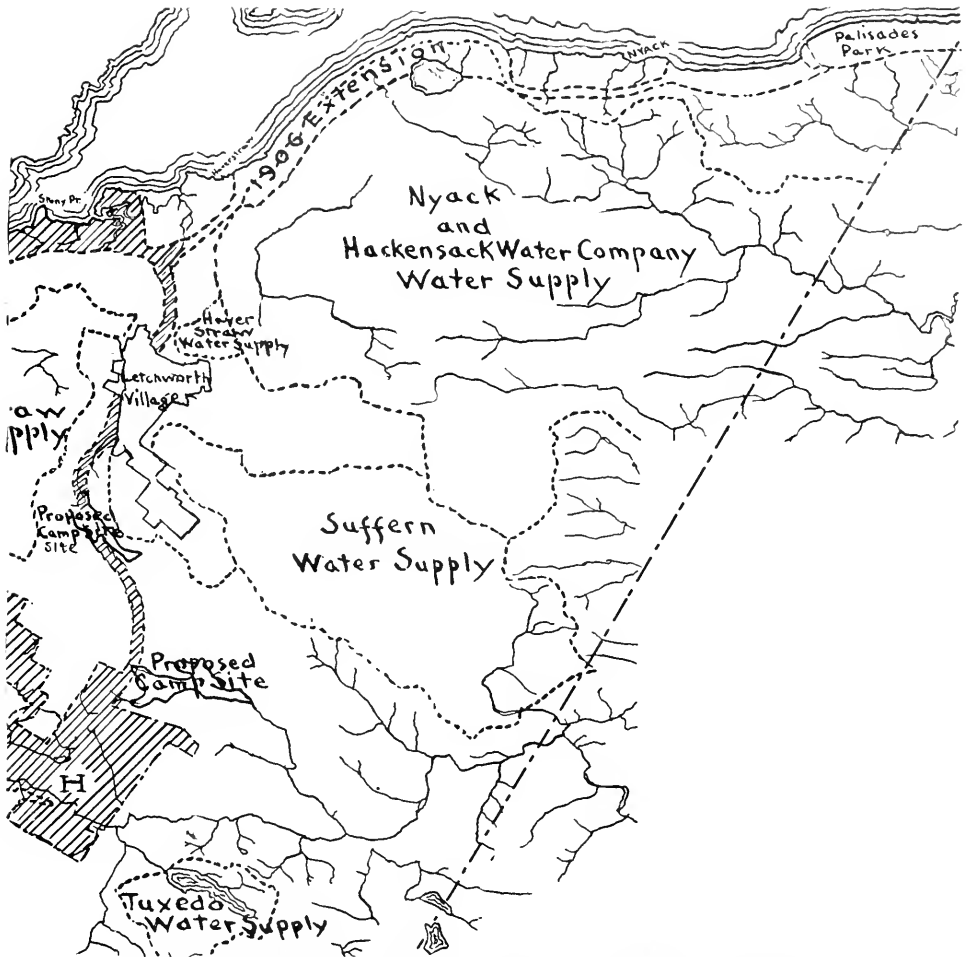
and the strips connecting them, are included almost entirely in the water-shed of Popolopen creek and its tributaries, ponds and streams from which the water supply for West Point is obtained. Immediately south and adjacent to this is the water-shed of Cedar Pond brook which is used as a source by the Haverstraw Water Supply Company. Northeast and adjacent to the West Point water-shed is that of Highland Falls, which is crossed by the proposed extension of the park passing to the west of the West Point reservation. Adjoining and north of the Highland Falls water-shed is that from which the village of Cornwall gets its supply.

Immediately south of the Cedar Pond brook water-shed is that of Miniscongo

creek. The proposed strip of land connecting the main portion of the Harriman gift in the town of Tuxedo, as well as Letchworth Village, lies on this drainage area. The middle branch of Miniscongo will furnish the water supply of the new Custodial Asylum. The north and south branches of this stream, however, are not used as a source of water supply.

Immediately west of the drainage area of the north branch of Miniscongo creek is that of Stony brook and a portion of that of the Ramapo river containing most of the Harriman gift. Stony brook is tributary to the Ramapo river which discharges into the Pompton river and thence into the Passaic. With the exception of Little Falls, N. J., which fil-





PARK AND THEIR RELATIONS TO MUNICIPAL WATER SUPPLIES.

ters its supply from the Passaic, so far as can be ascertained from the information at hand, no municipality takes its supply from that portion of the Ramapo drainage area above mentioned.

Immediately south of the Miniscongo creek drainage area and west of the range of mountains forming the west bank of the Hudson in the 1906 extension of the Palisades Park, are the water-sheds of the Hackensack river, Pascack creek, and the Mahwah river, the first supplying Nyack, the first two the Hackensack Water Company which furnishes water to municipalities in northeastern New Jersey, and the third the village of Suffern. Adjoining the Mahwah river drainage basin at the north is that of the middle branch of Miniscongo creek which is

to be used as a source of water supply by Letchworth Village.

#### PARTS AVAILABLE FOR CAMPS

Generally speaking, then, two portions of the proposed park remain available for development as recreation grounds without endangering the purity of any water supply. The first is a strip of land varying in width from one-half to two and one-half miles, extending along the Hudson from Haverstraw to Newburgh. The other is the main portion of the Harriman gift and the land included in the drainage areas of the Ramapo and Miniscongo creek between it and the Hudson.

The Parks and Playgrounds Committee of the Municipal Arts Society recently made a reconnoissance of large



NEW STATE ROAD ALONG THE HUDSON.

portions of each of these localities and discovered three splendid camp sites. The first overlooks the Hudson at one of its most beautiful portions. It is west of Iona Island, northwest of Dunderberg mountain at Highland lake on the eastern slope of Great Bear mountain covering the site of the proposed new state prison. The second is on the drainage area of the north branch of Miniscongo creek about three miles west of Thiells, at a point where a small dam thrown across a gorge will create a beautiful lake about

two miles long. The third site is at and south of Johnstown, where another artificial lake having two branches respectively three and two miles long can be built at small expense.

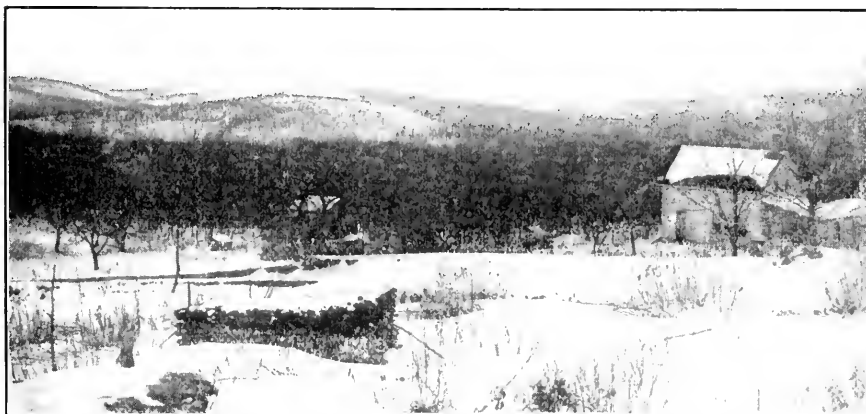
The Highland lake location is ideal for a camp and offers remarkable possibilities for use in both summer and winter. It is about forty-three miles north of Forty-second street, New York, about fifteen miles south of Newburgh and about thirty miles south of Poughkeepsie. It is easily accessible by rail and



HIGHLAND LAKE, AT BEAR MOUNTAIN PLATEAU.



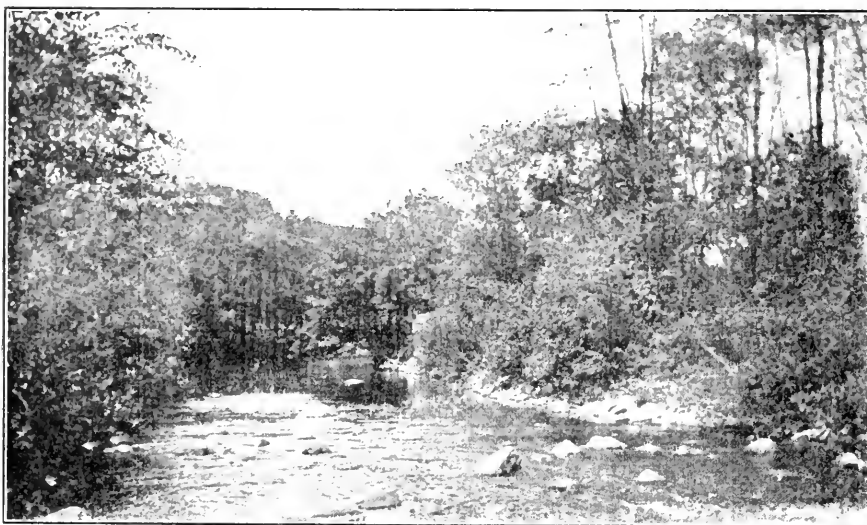
FROM THE HIGHLANDS, LOOKING TOWARD THE HUDSON.



THE BACK COUNTRY.



STATE ROAD FROM HAVERSTRAW WEST.



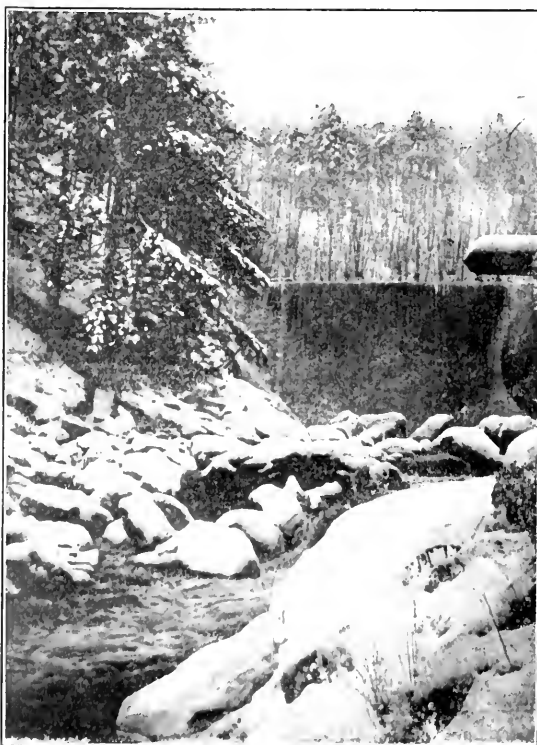
MINISCONGO CREEK AT THIELLS.

water, being on the route of an improved highway extending along the Hudson from Fort Lee to Newburgh, and would be a convenient stopping point for day excursions.

Immediately north of Highland lake is a comparatively level strip of about 500 acres which could be developed into baseball fields, tennis courts, fields for athletic contests and other playgrounds. South of the lake, including the proposed site for the new state prison and extending west of Dunderberg mountain to the north face of the Timp, is a location which offers splendid opportunities for scenic development and for the building of a good-sized pleasure resort for week-end and vacation parties. The fine opportunities for toboggan slides, snow shoeing, skiing and ice sports on Highland lake make this a good site for a winter park as well.

On the mountain sides west of this a number of good-sized spring brooks flow down the gulleys. A series of small reservoirs in these gulleys, at the same elevation, would provide an ample supply of pure water. The sewage could readily be led to

one point at the edge of the Hudson removed from the settled sections and there discharged after proper treatment in a settling tank. Arrangements can be made to secure light and power from Po-



DAM AT FORT MONTGOMERY.

April 2, 1910.

polopen creek at a point just west of Fort Montgomery. In brief, this is an admirable site for a public park and recreation ground.

A portion of this proposed Highland lake recreation ground, as pointed out above, is already owned by the state, which bought it for a site for the new state prison. One of the conditions to the additional subscriptions of \$1,625,000 to supplement Mrs. Harriman's gift, was "that the state discontinue the work on the new state prison located in Rockland county, and relocate the prison where, in the judgment of the Palisades Park Commission, it will not interfere with the plan and purposes of the commission." Governor Hughes stated in his message that "it is also fitting that the location of the new state prison shall not interfere with the execution of the plan, and that another site should be found therefor."

It appears from a conversation with the prison officials that the present proposed site is undesirable for two reasons: first the surrounding country is a wilderness covered with small second growth trees which make it practically impossible to apprehend escaped prisoners; second, the site offers practically no opportunities for the agricultural pursuits in which the prison officials wish to engage. It is understood that the State Prison Commission is favorably considering a suggestion that the present state military encampment ground just north of Peekskill be secured as a prison site. This is free from the objectionable features referred to and will meet with but little objection from the residents of Peekskill. The state military encampment ground can be located within the proposed Harriman State Park, south of Highland Falls, southwest of North Haverstraw, west and northwest of West Haverstraw, at Thiells, or about two and one-half miles south of Thiells.

The contracts for the construction of the prison buildings have not yet been let, and whatever preliminary work has been done in preparing the site has not been wasted, for much of the same work would have been necessary in developing recreation grounds. It seems, there-

fore, that the state Legislature can render no greater service than by carrying out the governor's recommendations of changing the site of the prison so that "we may thus at an early day secure the conservation of the natural beauty of the west bank of the Hudson river and the provision of a public park of inestimable advantage to the people."

The Adirondack mountains become increasingly popular as summer vacation grounds, not only on account of their pure and exhilarating air and forests, but on account of the many lakes and ponds. A resort having all these attractions can, at a comparatively small cost, be developed in the second of the portions of the Harriman Park described above, and meet the needs of those in the southern part of the state who cannot afford a trip to the Adirondacks, but who desire more privacy than is possible at the Highland lake site.

The second and third available sites pointed out are suitable for such development. Only a portion of one of these is included in the Harriman gift, but both are adjacent to it and to each other and come under the classification of those parcels of land adjacent to the tract given by Mrs. Harriman and intervening between it and the Hudson river, which are to be acquired by her additional gift.

The first of these two sites is located about three miles west of Thiells on the north branch of Miniscongo creek. Here there is a narrow gorge between the mountains separating the drainage area of this stream from that of Cedar Pond brook and that of the middle branch of Miniscongo creek. It appears that a dam across this gorge about 500 feet long and about 50 feet high at its deepest part would give an artificial lake at an elevation of about 1,030 feet above sea level, about a mile and a half long, with an area of about 250 acres. The lake would be located in a comparatively broad valley, giving ample opportunity for a large number of cottages and camps. The site can be easily reached by rail or water to Haverstraw, and thence by stage over a state road through a hilly country giving a most beautiful



view of the Hudson, or by rail to Sloatsburg or Southfield and thence by stage. Pure water for the resort can be obtained either by impounding some small stream as the upper portion of the middle branch of Miniscongo creek or by pumping perhaps from Long pond or Cedar pond. The question of sewage would present no difficulties.

The second of these two sites lies immediately west of the one just described. Here about two miles south of Johnsonstown at a point about two and a half miles east of Tuxedo a small dam about 500 feet long and 100 feet high at its deepest part can be built across a narrow gorge on Stony brook giving an artificial lake extending north to and around Johnsonstown at an elevation of 770 feet above sea level. This lake would have two branches one and two miles long with an area of about 540 acres. The region is beautiful and there would be room for a large number of cottages. Water supply can be obtained either by impounding the upper portion of Stony brook at a point northeast of the resort or by pumping water from Long pond.

One cannot help picturing these lakes outlined at night by the camp fires with the call of the wild piercing the silence of the evening's solitude across those miles of the Ramapos, or still better the sunset on the Hudson when from the Bear mountain plateau there arises the smoke of a thousand camps, denoting peace and happiness in many thousand lives. Then would the spirit of King Minhaus of the Mohigans, who once owned these lands, cry out through the gusts of wind in hills: "At last my land is free to the children of the nation—my soul can be at rest."

Yet we need not stop with these few camps in the Ramapo valley. The state is broad and wide—these are but a beginning of the great park system which should connect the cities and towns of this state with these pleasure spots where the American spirit may be invigorated by a short return to the habits of the aborigines. Such a system would not only make New York state a beautiful garden but help us rear a race of men able to cope with the industrial demands which make her rich and powerful in the nation.



POPOLOPEN CREEK.



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